

Message Text

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ACTION EA-01

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PRS-01 PA-01 INR-01 /005 W

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O R 080415Z OCT 74 ZFF RUEHFO

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO USINFO WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 7976

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

SECDEF WASHDC/OASD/PA

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USINFO ALSO FOR VOA NEWSROOM, IOP/FW AND IEA

BANGKOK FOR HEDGES

BANGKOK, HONG KONG AND SAIGON FOR VOA CORRESPONDENTS

STATE FOR S/PRS AND EA/P

E.O. 11652: N/A

SUBJ: KHMER SITUATIONER, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1974

1. THE ARMED FORCES OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC HAVE WON A MAJOR SUCCESS IN A THREE-WEEK BATTLE TO DISLODGE KHMER COMMUNIST FORCES FROM A FIFTEEN-KILOMETER STRETCH OF ROUTE FIVE, SOME EIGHTY KILOMETERS NORTHWEST OF PHNOM PENH. AT 0615 HOURS ON 6 OCTOBER TWO FANK TASK FORCES, ONE MOVING SOUTH AND ONE MOVING NORTH ALONG THE HIGHWAY, LINKED UP, FORCING THE LAST ENEMY UNITS OFF THIS KEY ARTERY. A NUMBER OF LESSONS CAN BE DRAWN FROM THE BATTLE. ROUTE FIVE IS, BY ANY DEFINITION, 'STRATEGIC' IN ITS FUNCTION AS A SUPPLY ARTERY WITH THE AGRICULTURALLY-RICH NORTHWEST, INCLUDING THE TONLE SAP LAKE AREA. PURSAT AND KOMPONG CHHNANG ARE HEAVILY DEPENDENT FOR THEIR LOGISTICAL AND FOOD SUPPLY ON THE STRATEGIC HIGHWAY. SO, TOO, IS THE CAPITAL, PHNOM PENH.

2. FROM PHNOM PENH TO KOMPONG CHHNANG IT IS A

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DISTANCE OF 90 KILOMETERS ALONG ROUTE FIVE. IT IS

ANOTHER 195 KILOMETERS FROM KOMPONG CHHNANG, A VITAL RIVER PORT AND ROAD JUNCTION, TO BATTAMBANG. BATTAMBANG IS ANOTHER MAJOR PROVINCIAL CAPITAL IN THE NORTHWEST ALONG THE SAME HIGHWAY. AND, FROM BATTAMBANG TO THE THAT FRONTIER IT IS ANOTHER 110 KILOMETERS ALONG THE SAME VITAL ROUTE. WHILE IT WILL REMAIN A CONSTANT PROBLEM FOR FANK FORCES TO KEEP ROUTE FIVE OPEN ALONG ITS ENTIRE 400 KILOMETERS, IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE BREACH AT KOMPONG CHHNANG COULD NOT BE TOLERATED.

3. IT HAS LONG BEEN KNOWN THAT THE KHMER COMMUNIST FORCES WOULD ATTEMPT TO CUT ROUTE FIVE AT SOME POINT. BY 17 SEPTEMBER IT WAS CLEAR THAT A MAJOR ENEMY EFFORT IN THE VICINITY OF KOMPONG CHHNANG WAS UNDER WAY. BETWEEN 17 SEPTEMBER AND 23 SEPTEMBER FANK AND AUTO DEFENSE FORCES WITHDREW FROM SOME 20 SMALL OUTPOSTS ALONG THE DEFENSIVE PERIMETER NORTHWEST OF KOMPONG CHHNANG. HOWEVER, A SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THE WITHDRAWAL WAS THE VALUABLE TIME GAINED FOR GOVERNMENT FORCES THANKS TO THE DELAYING TACTICS AND DEFENSIVE ACTIONS OF POPULAR FORCES. THE LATTER ARE FARMERS AND VILLAGERS WHO PURCHASE THEIR OWN WEAPONS AND RADIOS AND FIGHT TO DEFEND THEIR OWN HOMES AND FAMILIES. BY 23 SEPTEMBER ROUTE FIVE WAS CUT BY ENEMY FORCES. THE CUT WAS A SIGNIFICANT FIFTEEN KILOMETER BREACH BEGINNING JUST 6 KILOMETERS NORTHWEST OF KOMPONG CHHNANG.

4. BY 28 SEPTEMBER SIGNIFICANT FANK REINFORCEMENTS HAD BEGUN ARRIVING. ON 1 AND 2 OCTOBER TWO FANK TASK FORCES WERE IN MOTION ALONG ROUTE FIVE, ONE MOVING NORTH TO SOUTH, AND ON SOUTH TO NORTH, IN A MOVE TO CATCH THE ENEMY IN A PINCERS. THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE TWO FANK TASK FORCES WAS INITIALLY 21 KILOMETERS. BRQY BATTLE WAS FOUGHT BY TASK FORCE 'ALFA' MOVING SOUTH TO NORTH, DURING THE FIRST STAGES OF THE OPERATION, WHEN APPROXIMATELY 60 ENEMY WERE KILLED IN WHAT PROVED TO BE A DECISIVE ENGAGEMENT. PROGRESS FROM THIS POINT ON WAS STEADY. EQUALLY KEY IN THE SUCCESS OF THE OPERATION WAS SUPPORT RENDERED BY THE KHMER AIR FORCE. AN ESTIMATED 287 KHMER COMMUNIST SOLDIERS WERE KILLED IN

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AIR STRIKES BY GOVERNMENT PLANES. IN ALL, 487 KHMER COMMUNIST SOLDIERS WERE KILLED DURING THESE ACTIONS WHILE GOVERNMENT LOSSES ARE AN ESTIMATED 60 KILLED AND 221 WOUNDED.

5. THE ACTION AT KOMPONG CHHNANG HAS AGAIN DEMONSTRATED THAT THE ARMED FORCES OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC ARE ABLE TO GIVE A GOOD ACCOUNT OF THEMSELVES WHEN THE PRESSURE

IS ON. IN TERMS OF LOGISTICS AND SUPPLY, THE SUCCESS
AT KOMPONG CHHNANG HAS RELIEVED ECONOMIC PRESSURE ON
SEVERAL MAJOR CITIES, INCLUDING THE CAPITAL. AND, IT
IS WORTH REPEATING THAT FARMERS AND VILLAGERS, FIGHTING
SIDE BY SIDE WITH GOVERNMENT TROOPS, HAVE DEMONSTRATED
THEIR VALUE AS A SUPPORTING ARM OF THE KHMER MILITARY
FORCES. THEY HAVE ALSO GIVEN A CLEAR INDICATION OF
WHERE THEIR LOYALTIES LIE IN 'THE CONTEST FOR MINDS
AND HEARTS' IN CAMBODIA. FINALLY, THE KHMER AIR
FORCE HAS AGAIN DEMONSTRATED ITS GROWING CONFIDENCE
AND ABILITY TO PROVIDE THE 'SUNDAY PUNCH' WHEN IT IS
MOST BADLY NEEDED.

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